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RESIGN 4-24

CHICAGO (UPI) -- THE STATE DEPARTMENT WORKED OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS TO PERSUADE FORMER SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU TO RESIGN IN ORDER TO WARD OFF AN IMMINENT MILITARY COUP, THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE REPORTED WEDNESDAY.

IN A STORY FROM SAIGON, THE NEWSPAPER QUOTED REP. NGUYEN VAN CU, A VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE OFFICER AND PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO FORMER PREMIER NGUYEN CAO KY, AS SAYING:

"THE AMERICAN EMBASSY KNEW THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A MILITARY COUP IF THIEU HAD NOT RESIGNED, SO IT PLAYED THE ROLE AS A MEDIATOR, MOVING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN OPPOSITION LEADERS AND PRESIDENT THIEU."

CU SAID U.S. AMBASSADOR GRAHAM MARTIN VISITED KY'S RESIDENCE AT TAN SON NHUT AIR BASE NEAR SAIGON TWO WEEKS AGO AND PLEADED WITH KY TO HELP PREVENT A MILITARY COUP, THE TRIBUNE SAID.

WHEN KY ASKED WHY HE SHOULD DO THAT, CU SAID, "AMBASSADOR MARTIN REPLIED THAT HE WAS WORKING TO GET THIEU TO RESIGN AND THAT SUCH A RESIGNATION COULD COME AT ANY TIME."

CU SAID THAT KY HAD TOLD HIM OF THAT CONVERSATION, THE TRIBUNE REPORTED.

CU WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT AT THAT POINT THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN KY AND MARTIN WAS TO BE KEPT IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE. "BUT NOW THAT THIEU IS GONE, THERE IS NO LONGER ANY REASON TO HIDE IT," CU SAID.

THE TRIBUNE SAID WHEN THE AMERICAN EMBASSY WAS ASKED TO CONFIRM THAT MARTIN HAD INTERVENED TO PERSUADE THIEU TO RESIGN, A PRESS AIDE REPORTEDLY CONSULTED WITH THE EMBASSY'S POLITICAL SECTION AND REPLIED: "WE ARE NOT DABBLING AROUND IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THIS COUNTRY."

"WE WERE JUST AN INCH AWAY FROM A MILITARY COUP WHEN MARTIN CONTACTED US," CU WAS QUOTED BY THE TRIBUNE. "HIS STATEMENT THAT THIEU WOULD RESIGN WAS THE ONLY REASON WE HELD OFF."

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